Seeing the Elephant

Colorado Gold Rush drummer ambushed
 by the circus parade, his goods
helter-skeltered along spooked horses.

Hours to gather up (as God might say).
At the saloon they say "Weren’t you mad?"
 "Of course not! I saw the elephant!"

 It becomes the text for all to underscore
and gloss the madness of the filth and murders,
   the starving, the gamblers and their sluts.

   And when the hard luck husks go home,
broke, tubercular, spitting blood, just short

 of the real gathering-up, "How was it?"
      they ask in sensible Indiana.

        No matter the answer when
        you’ve seen the elephant.